

No Kidding

CHECK OUT THOSE BACHA LOG MOVIES



Play it again: Sana Sayyed and Parzan Dastur

There is one thing our country has a surfeit of, and that is kids. So it shouldn't be difficult to find a few talented specimens for the movies. But looking at the precocious little monsters that pass off as children in Hindi movies, you wonder where all the normal children hide when the camera's a talent scout around.

Everywhere else, films featuring kids are audience-magnets. Here, even kids turn up their noses at films made especially for them.

In recent months, there were two films with and about children—*Raju Chacha* and *Rahul*—both of which didn't work. The directors (**Anil Devgan** and **Prakash Jha**) had the resources to get the best kids they could find from among the brats with showbiz dreams who must have turned up in droves for auditions. But put a kid in front of the camera, and the cuteness quotient goes up several notches. They automatically put on a cloyingly sweet song-song voice and wide-eyed look.

Making a child not 'act' like a child is a major headache for any director. Also, the standards for kiddie cuteness were set way back and every succeeding crop of Mas-

ters and Babies slavishly follows that style.

Meena Kumari, Nargis, Suraiya, Madhubala also did a few films as kids, but **Tabassum** was perhaps the first child 'star'. She played the little coquette in several films in which childhood sweethearts sang romantic numbers and pined for each other when they were separated.

Kids in those halcyon days were expected to be angelic. Even if they were naughty, they were angelically so, and watching some of the old films today makes one laugh or grit one's teeth depending on just how syrupy they were. *Bachpan ke din bhula na dena* surely comes under the irritating category!

In the 1950s, there was a spate of patriotic and inspirational films with kids like *Jagruti*, which had some rousing Pradeep numbers like *Aao bacho tumhein dikhaye jhaanki Hindustan ki*, *Hum laaye hain toofan se* and *De di hamein azaadi*.

Even **K.A. Abbas** had a crack at a socially relevant film seen from a child's point of view—*Munna*, starring the then-popular Master **Romi**. The RK ban-



'Lonesome': Rahul



Fur-out: Raju Chacha

ner produced *Boot Polish* directed by **Prakash Arora**, starring Baby Naaz and Master **Ratan Kumar** as kids who want to give up begging and make an honest living—it had the hit songs *Nanhe munhe bache teri mutthi mein kya hai* and *John*

Chacha tum kitne achche. Rajkamal Studio produced *Toofan Aur Diya* in 1956 about a kid (Master **Satish**) who tries to cure his sister's blindness.

In 1957 again, RK produced **Amar Kumar's** *Ab Dilli Door Nahin* about a kid (Romi) who wants to rescue his wrongly-accused father from the gallows by appealing to the President.

Then there were the regular brats who appeared in the family socials and melodramas that cropped up with regularity. The very popular sisters **Honey** and **Daisy Irani** and Master **Babloo** were like dollops of extra sugar in dessert...in films like *Bandish*, *Ek Hi Rasta*, *Chirag Kahan Roshni Kahan*, *Zameen Ke Tare* and *Pyar Ki Pyaas*.

Rajshri's *Dosti*, directed by **Satyen Bose**, starring **Sushil** and **Sudhir Kumar** with Baby **Farida** (*Gudiya humse roothi rahogi*), was not exactly a children's film, but the story of the friendship between a blind boy and a lame one. For some reason, the lachrymose film (with great songs) was a huge success.

Prasad Productions did a colourful version of *The Prince And The Pauper* with **Mahesh Kumar** (now film-maker Mahesh Kothare) and AVM a remake of *Parent Trap* with Baby **Sonia** (who grew up to be **Neetu Singh**) in which the kids

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were a little more natural, even though they had to sing songs like *Ma tu kitni achhi hai* and *Bache man ke sacche*. Another South production, *Nanha Farishta* with a podgy Baby **Rani** (*Bache mein hai Bhagwan*) reforming a gang of brigands, was also a surprise hit.

In this crowd of kids running riot was an adorable **Sonu** making friends with a homesick Pathan (**Balraj Sahni**) in **Hemen Gupta's** *Kabuliwala* produced by **Bimal Roy**, and Master **Bunty** in **Chetan Anand's** *Aakhri Khat* looking for love and care (*Baby's Day Out* came much much later!) on the streets.

It wasn't till **Bhappi Sonie's** *Brahmachari* came along that kids behaved like kids. This one made a star out of **Junior Mehmood** with his peculiar lisp. The real Mehmood tried to introduce his kids to films in *Kunwara Baap*, *Mastana* and *Gini Aur Johnny*, but without much success.

Kid stars like **Sachin**, **Sarika**, **Shahid**, **Satyajit**, **Bunty**, **Bobby**, **Pinky**, **Alankar**, **Pallavi Joshi**, **Mayur** and **Guddu** burst on to the scene and vanished by the time they reached adulthood. Some had short-lived film careers as adults, but by and large they could never repeat the success of their childhood.

Khushboo became a star in the South and **Padmini Kolhapure** gave some remarkable performances as a kid (*Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, *Gehrayee*) before graduating to leading lady.

Gulzar always managed to extract utterly natural performances from child actors. Master **Raju** in *Parichay*, *Kitaab* and *Kinara* was one of the most lovable child actors who also fizzled out when he grew up.

The film which still holds the honour for introducing the cutest ever kid in Hindi films is **Shekhar Kapur's** *Masoom*. **Jugal Hansraj** with his sad eyes begged **Shabana Azmi** for affection, as she refused to accept a child born out of her husband's (**Naseeruddin Shah**) illicit affair. The film had two very delightful little girls **Aradhana** and **Urmila** (who grew up to become the

bombshell **Urmila Matondkar**). It also had the all time popular number *Lakdi ki kaathi* written by **Gulzar**.

To **Shekhar Kapur** also goes the credit of directing another pleasing film *Mr India*, in which **Anil Kapoor**, **Sridevi** and a band of children defeat

12 MEMORABLE FILMS WITH KIDS

Boot Polish (1954): Prakash Arora made this film under the RK banner, about a group of urchins trying to give up begging and earn their bread with honest labour; it starred popular child actors **Baby Naaz** and Master **Ratan Kumar**.

Kabuliwala (1961): **Hemen Gupta's** version of Tagore's heart-warming story about a lonely Afghan refugee's (**Balraj Sahni**) affection for a sweet little girl.

Aakhri Khat (1966): **Chetan Anand's** tender film about a lost infant (Master **Bunty**) wandering around the city looking for someone to love him.

Brahmachari (1968): **Shammi Kapoor** whooped it up in this **Bhappi Sonie** film about a guy who runs an orphanage full of hyper-energetic kids.

Parichay (1972): **Jeetendra** played the serious, bespectacled teacher to stern **Pran's** grand-kids in **Gulzar's** version of *The Sound of Music*.

Kitaab (1977): **Gulzar** takes a look at a marriage going wrong from a bewildered child's (**Master Raju**) point of view.

Masoom (1983): **Shekhar Kapur's** debut as a director starred the adorable cherub **Jugal Hansraj** as a kid born from a short-lived adulterous affair striving to fit into his father's (**Naseeruddin Shah**) 'legit' family.

Chhota Chetan (1984): The 3-D film, *My Dear Kuttly Chattan*, dubbed from Malayalam to Hindi, was about the escapades of three kids and a genie.

Mr India (1987): **Shekhar Kapur** took the idea of a man (**Anil Kapoor**) running an orphanage from *Brahmachari*, added to it elements of sci-fi and made a crazy caper about kids defeating the villainous **Mogambo** (**Amrish Puri**)

Salaam Bombay (1988): **Mira Nair's** acclaimed film used real street kids in a film about a 10-year-old's struggle to survive in Mumbai.

Anjali (1990): **Mani Ratnam's** film tells the story of a family's efforts to accept a mentally-challenged child.

Hum Hain Raahi Pyar Ke (1993): **Aamir Khan** is the unwilling guardian to three riotous brats, who are finally controlled by a cheerful runaway heiress (**Juhi Chawla**) in **Mahesh Bhatt's** adaptation of *Houseboat*.

12 COOL KIDDIE SONGS

Nanhe munne bache (Boot Polish—1954)
Nani teri morni ko mor le gaye (Masoom—1960)
Dadi amma maan jao (Charana—1961)
Chhakke pe chhakka (Brahmachari—1968)
Rail gaadi (Aashirwad—1968)
Hai na bolo bolo (Andaz—1971)
Re mamma re (Andaz—1971)
Saare ke saare (Parichay—1972)
Mere paas aao (Mr Natwarlal—1979)
Kaayda kaayda (Khubsoorat—1980)
Lakdi ki kaathi (Masoom—1983)
Chhota bacha samajhke (Masoom—1998)

the evil designs of Mogambo (Amrish Puri).

Mahesh Bhatt's *Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke* in which three kids harass their uncle (Aamir Khan) egged on by runaway heiress Juhi Chawla, and the 3D *Chhota Chetan* also remain kiddie favourites. Parzan Dastur in Karan Johar's *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is one of the few kids who has managed to come close to Jugal's chochweetness. Mani Ratnam's *Anjali* and Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* combined committed film-

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Ting tongue: Brahmachari

making with entertainment in a way both kids and adults could enjoy.

Nowadays, kids are smart alecky little adults—like Omkar Kapoor in Mahesh Kothare's *Masoom*, Adil in *Akele Hum Akele Tum*, Aditya Narayan in *Jab Pyar Kisise Hota Hai* and Yash Pathak in *Rahul*—pretty much like kids in real life.

No wonder the innocent, message-ridden offerings by the well-meaning Children's Film Society of India rarely find patronage with urban kids. *Halo* (Santosh Sivan) attracted crowds of kids and his *Malli* was well received too. Gopi Desai's *Mujhse Dosti Karoge* and *Bas Yaari Rakho* were a cut above the average.

And yes, lots of cute kids turn out to become not-so-cute adults. But for the perfect transition check out little Hrithik Roshan in *Bhagwan Dada* and see how he turned out!

Deepa Gahlot